19 may 2015

Madam High Representative, Mister Commissioner,

In this letter, we would like to restate our commitment to an ambitious post-2015 agenda and to realizing human rights of all, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as key drivers of sustainable development.

We wish to underline our support for universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights being fully incorporated into the post-2015 agenda as expressed in the joint statement to the 13th session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (14-18 June 2014), which was signed by 24 EU Member States.

In order to contribute effectively, fairly and equitably to achieving the sustainable development goals currently under negotiation, to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014, and to the Beijing Platform for Action, it is important that the promotion, protection and fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights are incorporated into the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and into the Council's future conclusions on gender.

Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights and they encompass universal access to sexual and reproductive health information, comprehensive sexuality education, products and services, as well as autonomy in decisions related to sexual and reproductive health. They are one with the right to health, the right to live free from any form of discrimination, the right to privacy, the right not to be subjected to torture, ill-treatment or sexual violence, and the right to determine the number of pregnancies desired and the spacing of births.

Respect for these rights remains key to reducing inequalities, combating discrimination and violence and eradicating poverty, and contributes to ensuring girls have access to education, decent jobs and good health conditions in the framework of sustainable development for all. Respect for these rights is a necessary condition to ensure to youth development opportunities to which they legitimately aspire.

Ms Feredica MOGHERINI
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission

Mr Neven MIMICA
Commissioner
International Cooperation and Development

These rights are currently refused to:

- almost 220 million women who wish to limit and space the number of pregnancies and who remain without access to modern contraception, leading every year to more than 80 million unwanted pregnancies and more than 20 million unsafe abortions that could have been prevented;
- almost 30 million girls who live under the threat of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) over the next 10 years;
- more than 15 million girls aged 15-19 who give birth every year, with more than 2 million of them younger than 15. In most cases, these births take place in the context of a forced marriage;
- almost 142 million girls who are likely to be married before their 18th birthdays by 2020.
- 1/3 of all women globally who according to WHO suffer from intimate partner violence

Moreover, more than 34 million people live with HIV, including 3.4 million children under 15. 400 000 adolescent girls and young women (10–24 years old) around the world are infected with HIV every year.

At a time when the fundamental rights that underpin the European consensus are threatened every day somewhere in the world, the EU's commitment to gender equality, non-discrimination and human rights is particularly relevant. This position needs to be defended clearly in the European Union's external action, as the world's leading development assistance and international solidarity donor.

That is why we consider that universal access to sexual and reproductive rights, including quality, comprehensive and affordable information, education and services, has to be included in the upcoming EU Action Plan on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment in Development and in the Council's future conclusions on gender. Through this new Action Plan, the EU needs to set itself new requirements for gender equality around the world. This is a major political imperative.

We call upon the European Union to make greater use of its funding and negotiating influence in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights. We encourage you to draw upon your leadership and convictions in the area of equality and non-discrimination to strengthen the EU's efforts to make those rights effective in partner countries and in international discussions.

Yours sincerely,

FRANCE
Annick GIRARDIN
Secretary of State for
Development and Francophony

SWEDEN
Isabella LÖVIN
Minister for International
Development Cooperation

UNITED KINGDOM
Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State for
International Development

BELGIUM
Alexander DE CROO
Deputy prime minister and minister of Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda, Telecom and Postal Services

NETHERLANDS
Lilianne PLOUMEN
Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

GERMANY
Gerd MULLER
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development

DENMARK
Mogens JENSEN
Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation

FINLAND
Sirpa PAATERO
Minister for International Development

PORTUGAL
Luís CAMPOS FERREIRA
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

LUXEMBURG
Romain SCHNEIDER
Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs

ITALY
Lapo PISTELLI
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

SLOVENIA
Bogdan BENKO
State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

CYPRUS
Ioannis KASOULIDES
Minister for Foreign Affairs

LITHUANIA
Andrius KRIVAS
Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs

GREECE
Foteini KOUVELA
Secretary General for Gender Equality

BULGARIA
Daniel Mitov, Minister of Foreign Affairs